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# Turning barren tin mining land into fertile forest

BY **MICHELLE CHUN**

newsdesk@thesundaily.com

**TUCKED** away in the heart of Bidor, Perak, sun rays sift through towering malabera trees while acacia pods lay scattered on a blanket of dried leaves covering the ground.

The serene calm of this man-made forest, otherwise known as the Tin Tailings Afforestation Centre (TTAC) or Rimba Bidor, is a stark difference from the noise of excavators clawing the same dirt to dig up tin ore decades ago.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) senior research officer and project founder Dr Ang Lai Hoe said the reforestation project, which began 15 years ago, is now in its first year of intense species enrichment – introducing tropical rainforest species into the area.

“We have begun introducing tropical rainforest species, such as *chengal*, *meranti* and *tongkat ali*, as it is now cooler after the trees we planted in the beginning are now 15 metres to 25 metres tall, providing adequate shade and a more humid environment for the tropical rainforest species.

“This is known as species enrichment and we are embarking on it intensively for three years as we aim towards creating a model that can be used for commercial use, tree-harvesting, or other productive uses besides rehabilitating the area,” he said to a group of international forestry experts during a technical visit organised by FRIM earlier this month.

In its first year of species enrichment, FRIM planted 2,540 plants of 20 various tropical rainforest species on 3ha of land.

The TTAC, sprawled over 121.4ha of barren ex-tin mine is now a fertile man-made forest comprising 15 exotics and local species.

“The greening of the project site employed cost-effective techniques that use agriculture waste as organic fertiliser and mulch, and also modified the water-table level to provide appropriate water supply to the forest tree seedlings,” Ang said, adding that the long-term plan is to turn it into a biodiversity depository and an eco-park.

Identified as a model project by the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, it is part of FRIM’s efforts to research and identify appropriate forestry systems for rehabilitation of degraded lands.

“One of the project’s aims is to prove there can be commercial use for forest land while maintaining the ecological balance.

“For instance, instead of clearing the land, building and then making space for greenery, developers can purchase land that has already been greened and create pockets of development within it,” said Ang, who is in charge of the research station.

He said such an environment, boasting a cool climate and clean air, had potentially huge commercial value as it was truly green living in

the park.

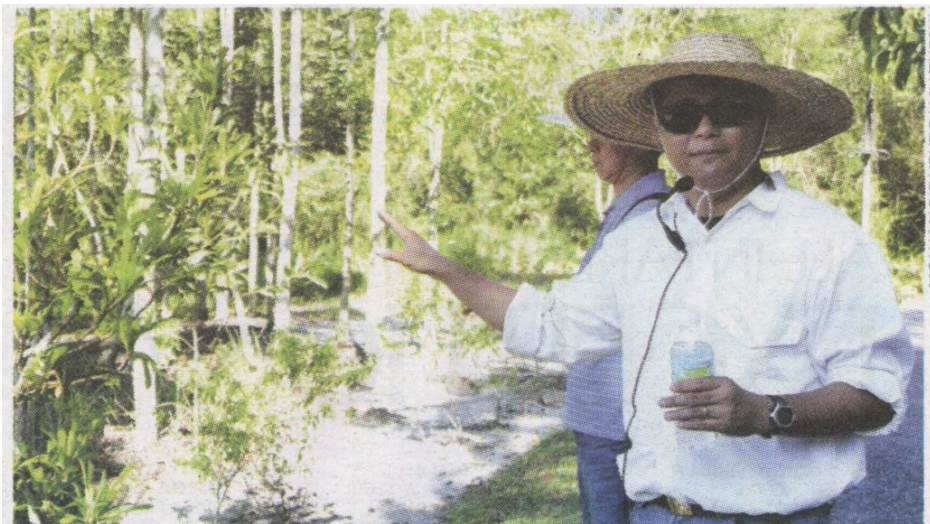
“Another commercial use of man-made forest grown on idle land or problematic soils like ex-tin mine would be sustainable tree harvesting for the timber industry. If proper management and tending regime are employed the man-made forest can be sustainably a wood production area and at the same time also may act as a biodiversity conservation site,” he said.

At TTAC, the reforestation methods are inexpensive as FRIM uses organic methods and leaves as much as possible to natural processes and regeneration.

“When the project first began, we planted exotic acacias as they are extremely tolerant towards heat and harsh conditions as well as some indigenous species capable of growing in these conditions.

“These fast-growing species provided shade from the heat, changing the micro-climate and enriching the soil, while animals and birds contributed to natural regeneration by

scattering seeds through their digestive tracks,” Ang said, adding that tree species not dispersed by birds and bats will be introduced through enrichment planting.



MOHAMAD FAIRUZ RAMLI/THESUN

Above: Ang at the Tin Tailings Afforestation Centre in Bidor, Perak .



A view of the restored forest .